

Two federal agencies hear public comment on how to get people outdoors

Rapid City Journal

PIERRE -- Officials from 2 federal agencies are holding a meeting in Fort Pierre on Wednesday to seek public comment on President Barack Obama's initiative aimed at finding ways to reconnect people to the outdoors.

Acting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Rowan Gould and U.S. Agriculture Department Undersecretary Jay Jensen will take part in the meeting. South Dakotans will get a chance to suggest ideas for boosting conservation and recreation.

At a federal conference in April, the president established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Meetings are being held across the nation to get suggestions for encouraging people to engage in more outdoor activities and for conserving land, water and historical and cultural resources.

Pierre has 'boatload' for outdoorsmen

Pierre Daily Capital Journal

PIERRE – Jesse Lisburg has lived in Pierre for about six weeks, but he knows there's a "boatload" of things to do if you like the outdoors.

He is the new private lands biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on South Garfield.

All of his family loves the community of Pierre. Lisburg's family consists of his wife, Angela, and two daughters, Morgan, 5, and Avery, 3, as well as what he calls his "other daughter", 7-year-old yellow lab, Dakota.

"If you are an outdoor enthusiast, there is a boatload of things to do here including hiking, biking, fishing, hunting," Lisburg said. "We haven't even touched the surface on that yet. There is just plenty to do here. It is a little hot, but at the same time you can't have it all."

Lisburg is working under the partners for fish and wildlife program. The program, Lisburg said, is all about multiple benefits projects on private lands.

"Those projects benefit federal trust species such as threatened and endangered species such as migratory birds," Lisburg said.

The primary goal in the Dakotas, Lisburg said, tends to be migratory birds.

"The difference between Tewaukon Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota and Pierre Wildlife Refuge is Pierre is more involved in creating wetlands and building dams to provide livestock water as well as wildlife habitat," Lisburg said.

Lisburg said the Pierre job is an improvement because Teaukon was hard to get conservation started and very hard to sell it.

"At Tewaukon, because it is extensively agriculture farming and black dirt farming, a lot of times it was tough to get conservation on the ground. I had to come to the table with a proposal, and then answer the question of 'what else do I get?'"

Lisburg said Pierre's program fits perfectly with livestock ranching, especially with building dams, fence, grass seedings and other projects.

"I think things will only get better here. I think for me, this is probably an improvement," Lisburg said.

Although Lisburg has lived in the Pierre community for a little over a month, he has already been busy working on an ongoing cooperative project with the American Creek Conservation District in Lyman County as well as projects in Jones County.

Lisburg said he has been primarily working in Jones, where there was already a short list of landowners that had contacted Jones County in the past

To fill the list of needs of those who contacted Jones County, there is a pot of funding available through a cooperative grant.

Lisburg said he took those contacts and went through them, made phone calls to see who had an interest or who still had a need. Then, Lisburg went out and looked at the sites.

"Most of the projects have been repair projects so far and we have been repairing rusted out culvert structures and some have been washed out by high flows over the last couple of years," Lisburg said.

To get information while Lisburg is out with landowners, he uses a laser level, which is survey equipment and can survey in the elevation of the dam and took points along the line and then took information back.

He has special software that helps read the cubic yards of fill he needs. All this information helps when estimating costs and can provide that information to the contractor who then can give a quote on that.

Lisburg is in charge of several counties including Jones, Lyman, Stanley, Dewey, Corson and Ziebach.

We have a cooperative grant that being administered by the American Creek Conservation District in Lyman County and Jones County. There are several partners that have cooperative on that including Game, Fish and Parks, Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, both of those conservation districts, Jones County and American Creek have partnered in on that to provide money for some commission funds

Jesse said he is living his dad's dream while working as a private lands biologist. He grew up living in Fargo, North Dakota and took every opportunity that there was to be in the outdoors.

"It started being a love and an appreciation of and for the outdoors. In high school I kind of wanted to be a game warden. I started my first couple years at NDSU Bottineau because it was well known for wildlife management," Lisburg said.

"After I got done with two years at NDSU Bottineau, I decided that I wanted and needed to go further to be able to get into a good job in the wildlife field area, so I transferred to SDSU in Brookings and spent three years and ended with a degree in wildlife and fisheries management."

Lisburg said he worked his first wildlife and fisheries job in 1997 as a fisheries technician at Devils Lake, N.D.

The next year, Lisburg decided that he wanted to try the wildlife side of things and worked as a biologist technician at Sand Lake Refuge in Columbia.

In 2000, Lisburg heard about a position at Tewaukon, which was a cooperative funded through Ducks Unlimited and North Dakota Game and Fish.

"What they wanted was to get someone on the ground to work on North American Wetland Conservation Grant (NAWCA) that the refuge had to service northeastern South Dakota," said Lisburg.

SD heirloom gun connects generations

Andrew McKean, Billings MT Gazette

In the wood-paneled basement of a stranger's South Dakota home, I learned a little about a grandfather I scarcely knew.

I was here for a family reunion of sorts, to spread the ashes of my late father on the prairie ranch where he spent his formative years. No McKean remain in this little town, but if you look hard enough you can see signs of our presence here: a pottery crock bearing the name of my great-grandfather's Depression-era general store on Main Street, an inscription to this same man on a cemetery monument recognizing local veterans, an entire chapter in the town's centennial yearbook devoted to my homesteading family, a ranch that's still called "The Old McKean Place."

Like so many early ranchers and sodbusters, the next generation didn't stick. My grandfather left the ranch for college, and while my father returned every summer for two decades, he never became a permanent South Dakotan.

But residents of a certain age still remember my ancestors, which is why I found myself in this basement, holding a double-barreled shotgun with a crude homemade stock. The gun is in the collection of a man who gathers firearms, as well as just about anything else with a Western theme.

He had invited me to his home with this appeal: "I have something of your grandfather's you might be interested in."

I had no idea it would be a gun. As he hefted the double-hammer shotgun out of his safe, he must have seen my stunned look. Only a couple of firearms have been handed down in our gun-loving family, and to be close to an heirloom like this quickened my blood.

"This was your great-grandfather's," said its current owner as I ran my hand over the seasoned wood that had felt the grip of my ancestors. "You might not know this about your grandfather, but he had the biggest lips of any man I've ever met. I guess when he was a kid he got his lower lip caught in one of those hammers when it fired, and it made a hell of an impression on him. When your

great-grandfather died and your grandfather was going through his things, he gave this gun to my father. He said he never wanted to see that *@#%* gun again.”

I inspected the shotgun, noting the tight Damascus barrels, the original checkered fore-end and the hand-carved stock. I felt years of hard use in its nicks and scars. Homely as it was, this gun was priceless to me, and as I handed it back to its owner, the shotgun seemed even heavier with connection and accumulated memory.

I realized I'd never see this heirloom again, and suddenly a thought occurred to me. I called over my 9-year-old son, and we posed for a quick photo with this piece of history, an artifact of our long-departed, fat-lipped, gun-loving ancestors.

Outgoing Iowa DNR chief blasts cuts in funding

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is "woefully and shamefully underfunded," outgoing DNR Director Richard Leopold said Monday.

Leopold, whose last day is Thursday, gave a blunt assessment of his agency's finances, saying less than one-quarter of 1 percent of the state's general fund is allocated to natural resources.

He said Iowa ranks 49th in natural resources spending per capita.

"We are doing a whole lot with not much, and we have seen in the past couple of years it has gone down even more," Leopold said during a meeting with Des Moines Register editors and reporters. He is leaving Iowa after nearly four years to accept a post with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minnesota.

The DNR receives money from more than 260 sources, but the state's general fund appropriation is critical because it is often used as a match to receive federal money, Leopold said.

The general fund allocation dropped from \$21 million a couple of years ago to around \$15 million last year, he said.

Programs suffering the most from budget cuts include state park operations, forestry, livestock operation enforcement, geological survey, and technical services provided to cities and counties, businesses and others.

"I have gotten I don't know how many complaints from legislators and small business owners about, 'You used to do this and now you don't any more.' Well, it is like, you want smaller government, this is what it looks like," Leopold said.

At Iowa's state parks, admissions are soaring, probably because people are staying closer to home because of the nation's economy, Leopold said. That has generated additional income from camping fees. In addition, the Iowa Legislature last session provided money for park infrastructure with a promise of more money over the next four years, he added.

"What we don't have money for is staffing" at state parks, Leopold said. "We have cut back on mowing, on cleaning bathrooms, on emptying garbage, on keeping trails open."

Volunteers and others have stepped up to help the state parks get by, but over the long term Iowans expect better maintenance of state parks, he said.

Iowa is also facing an "imminent crisis in forestry" because of the emergence of the emerald ash borer, the gypsy moth and other threats to an important industry that is also a recreational and land use resource, he said.

One of the DNR's successes has been a lakes restoration program, which Leopold described as "going great guns." State officials have merged socio-economic data with scientific data, spent some money and have been fixing lakes, he said.

"But our rivers are in bad shape. ... We are doing small things that are making things better locally, but cumulatively the state is still in very bad shape," Leopold said.

The DNR has been working with several partners, including state and federal agricultural officials, federal environmental administrators and others, on river issues.

But solutions are complicated because the DNR is butting up against geopolitical boundaries, such as local soil and water conservation districts, federal environmental protection regions and others. Priorities also need to be developed to target spending, he added.

Rod recovery: Dramatic loss, fantastic find complete amazing tale of lost birthday present

Steve Marshburn was helping his wife, Shannon, fix dinner in their Chubbuck, Idaho, home in May when the phone rang. His 5-year-old son, Matthew, rushed to answer, listened for a short while and then hung up. Marshburn figured it was a telemarketer.

When the phone rang again moments later, Marshburn picked up, noting that the caller ID recognized a Billings number.

Vic Redinger, 84, a retired Billings homebuilder, was on the other end of the line, hoping that his five-year quest might finally be at an end.

“The first thing I asked him was: ‘Are you a fisherman?’” Redinger recalled.

When Marshburn said yes, Redinger asked if he had ever fished at Montana’s Hebgen Lake. Marshburn again answered in the affirmative, somewhat puzzled by the line of questioning.

“You better sit down,” Redinger said.

Birthday present

It was the spring of 2005 when Marshburn traveled to Hebgen Lake to fish with his father and brother. An active duty Army Ranger at the time, Marshburn had recently received a brand new Sage XP rod and an Abel No. 1 reel as a birthday present from his father.

“It was probably the nicest possession I had at that point in my life,” he said.

The \$1,000 setup included a black reel with his full name engraved across the side.

The rod seemed especially gifted as Marshburn quickly caught a 3-pound rainbow as he kicked his float tube out onto the lake. As he went to unhook the fly from the fish’s mouth, he laid the new rod across his float tube. As soon as the fish was hooked onto the stringer, it thrashed and its tail knocked the rod off the tube. It quickly sank. Panicked, Marshburn grabbed the fly line and began pulling it in hand over hand, confident his rod would be on the other end. It wasn’t. He was heartbroken.

“It was kind of a big loss at the time,” he said. “I was pretty depressed that day.”

Fishing on the Fourth

Over the Fourth of July weekend that year, Redinger and his wife, Doris, were trolling on Hebgen in their small boat when Doris had what appeared to be a strike. When she began reeling it in, though, it didn’t feel like a fish.

“We kept thinking it was a stick,” Doris said. “It was kind of hard to get up.”

As it turns out the stick was a fly rod and reel.

“It was only a single hook she was fishing with,” recounted her husband. “The hook caught one of the eyelets in the middle of the rod. It was a million-to-one shot.”

After boating the rod, Vic noticed the black reel was inscribed with a name.

Search begins

When he got back home, Redinger searched the Internet for matching names, placing calls to men in North Carolina and Texas, but none had ever fished at Hebgen Lake. When he ran out of numbers to call, Redinger stored the rod and it was only mentioned as a fantastic fishing story.

“I thought I’d hit a dead end,” he said.

He had offers to buy the top-of-the-line setup, but declined.

“I didn’t want to sell it until I made every effort in the world to find the owner,” he said. “It was such a valuable rod and reel. That made me all the more anxious to find the owner.”

Then in May, while having dinner at his son Doug’s, house, the story came up again. Doug suggested Redinger take a new look on the Internet to see if any more Steve Marshburns had popped up. To his surprise there were two, one of whom was living in Idaho.

Full of hope, Redinger placed the call. A boy answered and quickly hung up on him. He called again and Marshburn picked up the receiver.

Blast from the past

“At first I thought it was a telemarketer,” Marshburn said. “But when he started asking more specific questions, my mind flashed to that rod and that day. I thought, ‘I will not believe you if you tell me you’ve found my rod.’ It was just shocking. I was completely floored that had happened.”

Redinger gladly shipped the rod to Marshburn along with a photo of him and his wife holding the rod and reel. In response, Marshburn wrote a three-page letter titled “The Heart of a True Fisherman” in which he extolled Redinger for his persistence in returning the rod to its owner. In the thank you he included a photo of him, his wife and son holding the returned rod.

In the letter, Marshburn wrote: “The whole experience is less about fishing and more about the character of our fishing mates.” He went on to write: “Because of Vic’s undying determination, I now look at (the day I lost the rod) with a different set of eyes. It is a day that gave me the fortune of speaking with Vic Redinger, an honorable fisherman from Montana who followed his heart because of his true love for fishing.”

The tribute choked up Redinger when he read it.

“It kinda made me tear up because he made me sound like a saint,” Redinger said. “I was so happy because this guy was in the Army. That’s why he didn’t have a permanent address. It’s just one of those flukes.”

Every year since losing the rod, Marshburn, now 31, has received a tether to attach his rod to his float tube as a birthday gift.

“I definitely use those safety features now,” he said.

But who would have thought he would be so grateful to receive the same birthday present as a gift twice.

“It’s kind of an amazing story” he said.

Busted pot growers mistake wardens for suppliers

California wildlife officials say two men are in custody after a group of marijuana growers started to toss bags full of pot into a pickup truck belonging to game wardens they mistook for their suppliers.

State Department of Fish and Game spokesman Pat Foy says two wardens in Tehama County were looking for deer poachers Monday night in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest when they heard footsteps behind them.

They turned and saw five men hauling large military-style duffel bags and sleeping bags. Foy said the men approached the wardens’ truck as if to toss the bags in the bed.

The wardens began shouting commands at the group and managed to handcuff two, one of whom was carrying a shotgun. Three others escaped into the forest.

The wardens recovered 127 pounds of processed marijuana.

89-year-old wins Wisconsin stamp contest

Vernon Javes’ right eye quickly darts left, then right, then left again as the fine-tipped paint brush in his hand traces lines the size of a human hair on an antique saw blade.

The finely-detailed feathers of a cardinal take shape as Javes struggles to cope with macular degeneration, a progressive eye disorder that has left the 89-year-old’s eye with a blind spot in the middle. The eye disorder has already ravaged Javes’ left eye, leaving him

blind on that side.

Some days his eyesight is so bad his wife, Gladys, has to hold his cup of coffee.

"It's getting harder to paint, but I still do it," Javes said.

Javes' persistence to pursue his self-taught passion paid off last week when he got a call from the state Dept. of Natural Resources notifying the retired baker his painting of a bearded tom turkey took the top prize in the state's 2011 Wild Turkey Stamp contest.

The stamp is required for turkey hunters to harvest a bird.

The painting depicts the turkey, its body covered with finely-detailed feathers, strutting through an early-spring woods. The painting is detailed in a style reminiscent of world-renowned artist Owen Gromme, a Fond du Lac native who won the Federal Duck Stamp contest in 1945.

Gromme later published the book "Birds of Wisconsin."

"I like my painting to be very detailed. I don't like that kind of abstract painting that looks like an elephant took a brush and went slop, slop, slop on a canvas," Javes said.

Javes said the turkey and scenery in the stamp are etched in his mind through years of hunting and observing.

"I get an image like a photograph in my mind and I paint it," he said.

Javes also won the turkey stamp contest in 1999.

Ironically, it was about 25 years ago, when Javes and his wife were turkey hunting near Necedah in west-central Wisconsin when his eyesight took a turn for the worst.

In a pre-dawn darkness, Javes told his wife a light must be burned out on the left side of the couple's car.

"I told Vern everything looked all right to me," Gladys said.

But her husband had lost his peripheral vision on the left side.

"Now I see nothing but black from my left eye," Javes said.

His eyesight hasn't stopped him from creating art — a passion that started decades ago when he began decorating cakes in a family-owned bakery in Milford, N.J.

"One day my mother needed to go out and told me 'Vernon. You'll have to decorate the cakes today,'" he said.

Javes' mother had an artistic background beyond cakes.

"My mother had worked in New York City for a furniture manufacturer painting designs on furniture. She was quick. She could look at a vase filled with flowers and have a painting done in 30 minutes," he said.

Hundreds of cakes would pass through Javes' hands before Rich Products purchased the bakery. Javes and his wife moved to the Fox Cities to work as baking and decorating instructors in Rich's commercial baking school and bakery in Appleton.

"In the evenings I didn't have much to do so I started painting," Javes said. "It's better than just sitting around."

The television in the Javes' home rarely came on as Javes pursued his painting and another passion — fishing.

Javes was featured in a September 1953 edition of *Mechanix Illustrated* in a story about walleye fishing.

Fish, birds, foxes and other animals decorate scores of artwork — some on canvas, others on pieces of wood or saw blades — covering the walls of Javes' eastside home.

"He's just one of those people who is not meant to sit around," Gladys said.

Javes' latest painting project, another blank saw blade, rests in his small studio — an oak desk he built in the couple's bedroom.

Javes is painting the saw for a friend in New Jersey. The painting will include a barn, but the rest is up in the air.

"I do know I ain't going to put a turkey on it," he said.